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REGENTS AWARD OVER \$6 MILLION IN "TOBACCO TRUST FUND" GRANTS FOR HEALTH RESEARCH AT LA. UNIVERSITIES

BATON ROUGE -- The Board of Regents today awarded \$6.1 million from the state's Millennium Trust, funded by the "tobacco settlement" money, to help underwrite medical and health care research at four Louisiana universities and medical centers.

"These programs are very important because they allow our institutions to address specific research on medical issues that affect many people in Louisiana," said Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie. "These proposals were reviewed by experts in the field. There was very tough competition and we believe the programs selected will lead to meaningful breakthroughs in areas such as cardiovascular, kidney and pulmonary medicine and in some of the new emerging sciences and technology such as gene therapy."

Receiving grants were:

- Louisiana State University, \$900,000, to study the impact of hurricanes and major flooding on public health.
- LSU Health Sciences Center, \$1 million to study longevity and aging in Louisiana.
- LSU Health Sciences Center, \$1 million for gene therapy and genetic diseases.
- LSU Health Sciences Center, \$800,000 for sexually transmitted disease research.
- Tulane Health Sciences Center, \$650,000 for cardiovascular, renal and pulmonary medicine.
- Tulane Health Sciences Center, \$700,000, for the Tulane-Xavier Center for Substance Abuse Research and Prevention.
- Tulane Health Sciences Center, \$844,500, for cardiovascular, renal and pulmonary medicine at the Tulane Hypertension and Renal Center for Excellence.
- University of New Orleans, \$205,500, for genetic and biotechnology research.

These eight grants, awarded through the Health Excellence Fund, were selected by outside panels of experts. A total of 49 proposals were submitted by eleven institutions. Today's action was the second round of funding from this program, which will award grants every two years. In 1999-2000, the Regents awarded grants totaling \$7.6 million to universities and medical centers.

"The competition for these grants is fierce and intense," said John Wallin, the Regents associate commissioner for sponsored programs administration. "Many of the best medical researchers in the state are applying. This guarantees that the projects funded will be first rate." He said the \$6.1 million awarded this year was enough to finance only eight programs. Others among the 49 submitted could have been funded if additional money had been available.

The funding source for this grant program is the so-called "tobacco settlement money" paid by the tobacco industry to the state in the late 1990s. In 1999, Louisiana voters approved a constitutional amendment that set up the Millennium Trust as a permanent investment for the settlement money. One of the funds in that trust is the Health Excellence Fund, a program that underwrites clinical and laboratory research in the health care sciences at Louisiana institutions.

"These grants build the capacities of our schools and they focus on the real needs of our people," Savoie said. "They are very high caliber programs and we look forward to some good things coming from this program."